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ABSTRACT

This newsletter describes the Reading Recovery program, developed in New Zealand to help low-achieving first-grade students "recover" 90 percent of average first-grade reading and writing skills after 12 to 18 weeks of intensive instruction. It is currently being implemented by school districts in the United States as well--statewide in Ohio and in school districts in Arizona, Texas, and South Carolina. Based on extensive research into the way good students learn to read effectively, the Reading Recovery program begins with a diagnostic test of first-graders' basic reading skills. Students at the bottom 20 percent of the class are then assigned individually, four per teacher, for daily half-hour, one-on-one Reading Recovery lessons that blend traditional reading instruction with modern whole language techniques. A two-part training program first certifies teacher-leaders at Ohio State University and then assigns them as teacher-trainers to local schools with a Reading Recovery program. Selected teachers begin with a one-week summer workshop on how to give and interpret the Reading Recovery Diagnostic Survey. Supervised by a leader, these teachers learn while working with at-risk students. Funding alternatives and addresses for more information are included with the newsletter. (TE)

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Updating SCHOOL BOARD POLICIES

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Reading Recovery: early help for at-risk readers

by Joseph Yukish

There is new hope for the 25 percent of the U.S. student population considered at risk of failing in school.

School officials and the public clamor for programs to reach at-risk students early, before they begin what for many becomes a habit of failure both in and out of the classroom. Developed and implemented nationwide in New Zealand, the Reading Recovery program helps low achieving first grade students "recover" 90 percent of average first grade reading and writing skills after 12 to 18 weeks of intensive instruction.

It is catching on in the United States, too. Reading Recovery is in its second year of statewide implementation in Ohio. This fall school districts in Tuscon, Arizona; Richardson, Texas; and Summerville, South Carolina will start the program.

Quick and lasting

One-on-one instruction by rigorously trained teachers enables a large percentage of Reading Recovery students to develop the critical links between reading and writing that can boost performance to an average or above average level.

Evidence so far shows that Reading Recovery students stay at or above grade level for at least three successive years, even with no additional Reading Recovery instruction.

Intended as a first grade curriculum supplement, Reading Recovery helps students who might otherwise be placed in special education or remedial programs. The instruction also improves student progress in these specialized classes. Reading Recovery is not a substitute for existing remedial and special education programs.

The higher price tag attached to Reading Recovery's small pupil/teacher ratio (4:1 daily) is balanced by the lasting results that are produced in a short amount of time. The program tackles one of the most important goals of any school system: helping all children learn.

Does it work?

An Ohio state-commissioned study of the 1984-85 Columbus City Schools pilot program reported that more than two-thirds (66 percent) of Reading Recovery students improved their reading and writing skills after 12 to 15 weeks of instruction.

During the first year of statewide implementation in 1986-87 the percentage of at-risk Ohio students showing significant gains jumped to 82 percent.

What it is

According to New Zealand educator and child psychologist Dr. Marie Clay (University of Auckland) who developed the program after seven years of research, the methods used to teach good readers can be adapted to the needs of poorer readers.

The research also focused on the ways good students learn to read effectively. At-risk students are confused about the basic reading process. They progress slowly and eventually fall further and further behind their classmates. Intervention must help these students accelerate reading performance faster than their peers in order to catch up.

When students respond appropriately to the structured set of lessons, they "recover" reading ability. As one child recovers and leaves the group, a new one is added from the at-risk group identified earlier in the Reading Recovery Diagnostic Survey. Most Reading Recovery teachers work with eight or more children during the school year, but an instructor never teaches more than four students a day.

Identification of students

At the beginning of the year, all first grade students are given a set of six diagnostic tests to determine the bottom 20 percent of the class in need of Reading Recovery. The evaluation provides information far beyond what is available from other standardized tests.

During the evaluation, the teacher observes students in the following skill areas:

- *Letter Identification*—Children identify the letters "a" and "g" from a set of 54 different characters, including upper and lower case letters and conventional manuscript print.
- *Word Test*—Students read a list of 15 words drawn from the most frequently found words in basic beginning "pre-primer" reading materials.
- *Concepts About Print*—While the teacher reads a book aloud, students are tested on 24 significant language concepts, for example, directionality and one-to-one word matching.
- *Writing Vocabulary*—Students write all the words they can in ten minutes, starting with their own names. Teachers may help students by saying basic vocabulary words.

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Joseph Yukish is professor of education at Ashland College in Ohio and director and site coordinator of the Ashland College Reading Recovery Site.

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- *Dictation*—Students write a dictated sentence and receive extra credit for every sound (phoneme) represented correctly. This test measures a student's ability to analyze words for their component sounds.
- *Text Reading Level*—Students read excerpts from standard first grade reading material. While the child reads aloud, the teacher records reading performance until the level falls below 90-percent accuracy. The teacher scores the passage according to the student's understanding and the strategies used to decipher the material.

Recovery process

The teacher selects four students from the pool of identified low achievers. Each of these students is at risk of failing the first year of reading instruction.

For three to five months, the student receives daily half-hour, one-on-one, Reading Recovery lessons that blend traditional reading instruction with modern whole language techniques. The process encourages students to develop their own links between reading and writing while they are actively involved in the act of reading.

Sample Lessons:

- A student reads and rereads "patterned" books having predictable language selected to match reading level. Beginning level books average 30 to 120 words in length.
- The teacher observes and records (a "Running Record") the student reading and rereading a book that was introduced in the previous session.
- The teacher and student analyze the Running Record for visual (graphophonic), meaning (semantic), and syntax errors.
- Letter identification practice.
- As a student writes a sentence in a personal writing book, the teacher assists in listening for the sounds in each word and understanding how the words are related to form a complete thought.
- After the teacher and student have reviewed a sentence from the writing book, the teacher copies and then cuts it into puzzle-like pieces. The student then reconstructs the original sentence.
- The student receives a more difficult book, emphasizing story comprehension and vocabulary. During practice reading sessions, the teacher coaches the student in good reading strategies. The child reads the book a second time to end the lesson.

Adaptability

Reading Recovery is adaptable to the two basic approaches used to teach first grade reading curriculum: skills instruction (basal) and whole-language.

Clay's analyses of Reading Recovery programs in Australia (varied classroom approaches), New Zealand (whole-language), and Columbus, Ohio (basal) suggest that students respond positively, regardless of the type of first grade reading instruction used.

Although teachers always work one-on-one with students and never with more than four a day, school systems can select from at least three common scheduling and teacher assignment models:

- Shared Classroom: In New Zealand and some Ohio programs, two teachers work together to create a shared classroom model. One of the first grade teachers spends half the day in the classroom and the other half with Reading Recovery students. The co-teacher alternates teaching duties in the classroom or Reading Recovery program.
- Substitute Teacher: The regular classroom teacher spends half the day teaching Reading Recovery with a substitute teacher taking on the regular classroom duties.
- Special Teachers: After a half day of regular duties, a remedial or special education teacher works with Reading Recovery students.

The shared classroom and substitute teacher approaches are preferred because the classroom teacher works with Reading Recovery students.

Teacher training

A two-part training program first certifies Teacher-Leaders at Ohio State University (Columbus, Ohio) and then assigns them as teacher-trainers to local schools with a Reading Recovery program.

Currently Teacher-Leaders must be trained at Ohio State University, although colleges and universities in other states will soon offer Reading Recovery leader training.

The graduate program provides intensive, on-site teacher training based on the best and most up-to-date methods. Similar to the student teaching portion of traditional education degrees, Reading Recovery teacher training combines classroom study with on-the-job work with at-risk first graders.

Teacher-Leaders. To insure quality, Teacher-Leaders receive a year of graduate-level instruction from Ohio State University faculty who have studied under Clay. Leaders become skilled in the close observation and assessment of reading/writing performance using Reading Recovery diagnostic and teaching methods.

The training program provides immediate service to children with a "learning-by-doing" format. Teacher-Leaders (in training) work with at-risk students from the Columbus, Ohio metropolitan area.

The final part of training assigns the graduate student to a trained Teacher-Leader, to "shadow," or learn the administrative and supervisory responsibilities of the Reading Recovery program.

After successful completion of the training, Teacher-Leaders earn 18 quarter-hours of graduate credit from the Ohio State University College of Education.

During the second phase of the program, Teacher-Leaders continue to teach at-risk first graders while at the same time training Recovery teachers at local schools.

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Recovery Teachers. Selected by local school districts, prospective teachers begin their year of training with a one-week summer workshop where they learn how to give and interpret the Reading Recovery Diagnostic Survey.

When public school classes begin in the fall, candidate Recovery teachers administer the tests to first grade students. Based on the results, four students from the bottom fifth of the class are selected to begin the program.

Supervised by a Leader, prospective teachers learn while working with at-risk students. Their graduate coursework focuses on both the theoretical and practical parts of the Reading Recovery method.

Teachers also learn how to create supportive, literature-based first grade reading programs where Reading Recovery children can receive regular classroom instruction.

Prospective teachers work with students behind a one-way mirror while fellow trainees watch and discuss the lesson's effectiveness. After the lesson, the Leader directs a follow-up discussion to pinpoint good teaching procedures.

After successful completion of the training year, the teacher earns six semester hours of graduate credit from Ohio State University. Public school districts with the Reading Recovery program are designated as satellite campuses. The Teacher-Leader serves as an Ohio State University adjunct professor.

Graduate credit is also offered by Ashland College, Cleveland State University, Ohio University, and Wright State University, four of the 23 Ohio teacher training sites.

An American import

In 1984, Ohio State University professors Charlotte Huck and Gay Su Pinnell led the effort to bring Clay and the Reading Recovery program to the United States.

During that year, Clay trained the first group of Reading Recovery Teacher-Leaders who were then qualified to train Recovery teachers to work with children in a pilot project in Columbus' first grade classes.

The success of the pilot program prompted the Ohio General Assembly to fund 23 regional training sites designated for school districts or college campuses.

The regional training sites, begun in 1985, made Ohio the first state in the nation to implement a statewide Reading Recovery program.

Funding alternatives

The Ohio Department of Education gives local school districts the following funding options for teacher training and staffing of Reading Recovery programs:

- Chapter I: Chapter I teachers may be paid from Chapter I funds while they are engaged in recovering children. An acceptable model might be recovering four children for two hours a day and working with groups of children for the remainder of the day. Reading Recovery teachers funded by Chapter I must meet all of the Chapter I regulations. Chapter I funds may not be used for the direct training of teachers or leaders in the Reading Recovery process. The funds may be used for attendance at the Reading Recovery Conference. Reading Recovery may not be the only Chapter I program in a building.
- Chapter II: School districts may opt to focus Chapter II funds on the B7 subchapter to help pay for the cost of training teachers to implement the Reading Recovery program. Also, these funds may be used to pay for substitutes while classroom teachers are engaged in recovering children.
- Disadvantaged Pupil Program Fund (DPPF): Funding for approved Reading Recovery programs may be requested from the DPPF. Approved Reading Recovery programs included in the DPPF program application must be reviewed and approved by the Division of Equal Educational Oportunities, Ohio Department of Education.
- Teacher Development Fund: School districts are free to use the Teacher Development fund to help defray the cost of training Reading Recovery Teachers or Teacher-Leaders.
- General Funds: School districts are free to use general funds to help defray any costs encountered in implementing the Reading Recovery program.

Excerpted from the Ohio Department of Education Reading Recovery Information Packet, January 1988.

For more information

Reading Recovery is recognized by the National Diffusion Network (NDN), a federally funded organization to promote exemplary educational programs. NDN offers limited financial assistance for tuition and other expenses to teachers from any state who are admitted to the year-long Ohio State University Teacher-Leader training program.

The early intervention methods used in Reading Recovery are increasingly featured in educational journals and on conference agendas.

Educators interested in a more detailed evaluation of the Ohio program should contact:

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A second chance

"Policy makers cannot guarantee that all children will learn, but they can support the belief that all children can learn by crafting legislation and allocating resources in ways that maximize the possibilities for learning," wrote NSBA legislation specialist Lynne Glassman, in *Updating* (May 1987).

With its track record of effectiveness, Reading Recovery is a resource that can maximize the chance of reading success for many at-risk children. ■